

**Rhode Island Department of Education
School Performance Categories
Face-To-Face Meeting Agreements**

**Johnston Middle and High Schools
April 4th, and May 1st, 2002**

Attending from Johnston on April 4th: David Santilli, Johnston School Committee; Joan Fagnoli, Principal Nicholas A. Ferri Middle School; Dr. Michael Jolin, Superintendent; Elizabeth Mantelli, Principal Johnston High School; Gregory Russo, Johnston High School Science Department; Jean Picano, Johnston High School Department Chair; Kathleen Pickel, Reading Consultant; Rita Kerwick Blythe, President of Johnston Federation Teachers; Bermie Dilullo, Nicholas A. Ferri Middle School; Nancy Brown, Professional Development Institute Director

RIDE Staff: Maria F. Lindia, Office of Assessment; Elizabeth Hyman, Office of Assessment; Linda Jzyk, Office of Research, High School Reform & Adult Education; Rick Richards, Office of School Improvement & Accountability; Mary Jo Foley, Office of School Improvement & Accountability; Elliot Krieger, Office of the Commissioner; Jennifer Wood, Office of the Commissioner

Attending from Johnston on May 1st: Julie Forte, Johnston Public Schools Transition Coordinator; Kathryn Kane, Johnston High School Guidance Counselor; Elizabeth Mantelli, Principal Johnston High School; Paul Germanowski, Johnston High School; Kathleen Kelly, Johnston High School Special Education; Gregory Russo, Johnston High School Science Department; Jean Picano, Johnston High School Department Chair; Anne Mantia, Johnston High School in School Suspension Program; Timothy Barnes, Johnston High School Social Studies; Alicia McCormick, English Department Chair; Kathleen Pickel, Reading Consultant; Donna Palumbo, English Department Chair; Dr. Michael Jolin, Superintendent; David Santilli, Johnston School Committee; Robert LaFazia, Johnston School Committee; Louis Salera, History Department; Paul J. Desrochers, History Department; Nancy Brown, Professional Development Institute Director; Rita Kerwick Blythe, President of Johnston Federation Teachers

RIDE Staff: Maria F. Lindia, Office of Assessment; Elizabeth Hyman, Office of Assessment; Linda Jzyk, Office of Research, High School Reform & Adult Education; Ina S. Woolman, Office of Special Needs

RIDE Welcome and Meeting Orientation

Deputy Commissioner Todd Flaherty welcomed the group and gave an overview of the process and objectives of the meeting including:

- Establishing of agreements on “next steps” as outlined in the School Performance Category Technical Assistance Bulletin with regard to required District/school/RIDE actions;

- Addressing district capacity for implementing activities/next steps (to be outlined in the May 1st CRP, Article 31 – Strategic Planning document for submittal to RIDE which also needs to be approved publicly in a Johnston School Committee meeting);
- Addressing RIDE capacity to support, if applicable; and
- Generating a meeting report, which needs to be made “public” at the district’s School Committee meeting.

District/School Response

Johnston representatives were given the opportunity to respond to the schools’ performance categories designations as it applies to their district and to describe existing school improvement efforts at the Nicholas A. Ferri Middle School and Johnston High School. Superintendent, Michael Jolin opened his remarks by stating while Johnston was not challenging the state performance categories, there are strong feelings that the Ferri Middle School should have not been identified as low performance. Given the demographics and the initiatives designed by administration, faculty and staff to improve student preparation and motivation it was stated that this school will improve. He said that Ferri’s administration, (one principal and one assistant principal), has had four different principals for the last five years. The current administrator is a permanent appointment. Principal Fargnoli is a true educational leader. Some of the positive initiatives taking place are:

- Enforcing consistent discipline
- Rewriting students and faculty handbooks
- Increasing parental involvement
- Creating safe school environment
- Instituting a quarterly newsletter
- Improving moral of faculty, students and parents

“In essence, we have invested in a number of long range strategic efforts that we believe will achieve the impact we desire in student achievement.”

Principal Fargnoli indicated that the school needs more opportunities for in-depth training in standards-based instruction. She said that her faculty and staff are highly motivated to bring their school to the next level. One barrier is identifying and having the funds to pay good trainers. They would like to participate in course I in order to start the process for capacity building. Superintendent Jolin stated that the school aide formula is problematic in terms of professional development funds.

Principal Mantelli, who had been at the High School for one week, indicated that 50% of the high school students are at the two lowest levels of achievement. Superintendent Jolin indicated that the high school has been in a state of turmoil for at least the past two years. They have had four principals in one year, thus, providing a lack of continuity in administration. Although Principal Mantelli has been there only for a short while, she has the support of her staff, the parents and that of the Superintendent. Everyone is comfortable that the “school will move”. The Superintendent stated that they are looking

very seriously at the high school to ensure that the school is addressing 100% of needs of all students.

Deputy Commissioner Flaherty indicated, "You have my support to call me or our legal counsel (Jennifer Wood) to get the help you need". Both principals at middle and high school stressed that time for meaningful professional development is an issue for their schools. A lack of funding is a significant barrier to more effective professional development. Superintendent Jolin indicated that schools should plan meaningful professional development and he will find the funds.

Programmatic/Instructional Actions

Nicholas A. Ferri Middle School

Principal Joan Fagnoli who is the 5th principal in four years described actions being taken to closing the gap in student achievement:

- Improving school climate
- Implementing quality standards based on quarterly reports
- Increasing data base with parents' names, addresses and emails
- Improving moral of faculty, students and parents
- Planning to rework curriculum for 2002-2003 school year
- Establishing common planning time
- Identifying students' needs and learning styles
- Embedding in the curriculum, brain based activities
- Encouraging teachers to be more involved in curriculum development issues

The School Improvement Plan (2001-2006) as presented, indicates focus on student work, review of "brain-based learning" and problem solving skills. Principal Fagnoli asked RIDE to help them with their professional development activities by starting with course I training. They would like to establish a training of trainers model. She also indicated that she has 100% support of the school committee. She believes that the middle school is poised to move forward. Several aspects of the plan indicate that the middle school will be able to greatly reduce the number of students in the lowest two categories of achievement. There are now higher expectations for students than ever before.

Johnston High School 4/4/02

Superintendent Michael Jolin introduced the newly appointed (one week) principal Liz Mantelli. Principal Mantelli is fully aware of the turmoil that exists at the high school since two years ago. Fifty percent of their students achieved on the two lowest levels. The school is currently under NEASC probation. There is no school improvement team at the school. America's choice is a model that the high school could join, the faculty has not fully reviewed it yet, however, it is being considered. The Superintendent indicated "we need a viable model". Principal Mantelli indicated that although there are many problems in the school, she knows that there are pockets of excellence and there are great teachers, but she needs time to:

- Establish trust
- Work on instruction plans
- Work on a meaningful professional development plan
- Develop a culture for teaching and learning

Superintendent, Principals, the Union Representative and the other attendees from Johnston felt that this was an extremely important message that the state is giving to schools. It would be critical that the Johnston High School faculty and school committee members hear directly from Deputy Commissioner Flaherty the real message as it was presented on April 4th at the face-to-face meeting. The Deputy Commissioner agreed and a meeting will be scheduled for that purpose. He will focus on an accountability system. Another meeting was scheduled for May 1, 2002 to prepare for the Deputy Commissioner's visit to the school and allow the Principal to present a draft plan for the high school.

Johnston High School 5/1/02

Superintendent Jolin began by expressing gratitude for everyone's participation and collaboration. He was very pleased that Principal Mantelli and a large group of teachers from the high school managed to put together a workable plan in order to lead the school in the direction of improving students' performance. Deputy Commissioner Flaherty indicated that the Article 31 has been in effect for five years and time is running out. Principal Mantelli described the process that she utilized to draft the working plan that was presented. She began by establishing a leadership team; twenty-five teachers volunteered to participate and attended the seven meetings (12 departments were represented). They are in the process of reconvening the school improvement team. The leadership developed the mission statement and the student expectations.

This plan is tailored to the current needs of all students. The report includes performance targets and strategies leading to student performance improvement. Although they are under NEASC probation the school is pleased with the report and cognizant of its importance. The leadership team will use the NEASC tactics to develop action plans and to improve the ways in which staff focus on standards look at student work; improve linkages across grades and departments and integrate writing rubrics across the curriculum. She ended by thanking everyone for their patience and to allow her to have some time to plan and then come back to present the school's working plan.

RIDE/Johnston Agreements:

Note: While it was intended that the changes/improvements discussed were to be incorporated in the district's strategic plan, the time frame in which this report is issued may preclude such from occurring to the degree anticipated. In order that participants in the May 1st, 2002 meeting "capture" proposed changes, such changes can be submitted in addition to the May submission if necessary. These changes include:

- Johnston (district) will develop a new strategic plan which incorporates all recent initiatives for the Johnston Public Schools.

- Johnston (district) will initiate a "centralized" curriculum development capacity which addresses Pre-K-12 standards.
- Johnston (district) will develop a professional development program which incorporates a schedule for training all teachers in standards based education.
- Johnston (district) will continue to build an extensive data analysis system to monitor student equity gaps and all levels of student achievement.
- Johnston Middle School will implement its new school improvement plan (Nicholas A. Ferri Middle School SIT Plan 2001-2006) and reach objectives stated in the plan. (Some of the objectives need to be quantified i.e. attendance rates, discipline referrals, etc.)
- Johnston Middle School will develop a program which targets a much more "precise" process for transitioning students from the elementary schools to the middle schools.
- Johnston High School will immediately (based on the May 1st meeting) refine and implement a school improvement plan based on the input from a properly constituted School Improvement Team and acknowledgement by the entire faculty.
- Johnston High School staff will undertake a series of activities which will lead to improvements in student achievement by:
 - implementing a system of professional development which promotes standards-based teaching,
 - using all available data to understand how best to address student equity gaps and develop strategies for students in the lowest two levels of achievement categories (see attached data analysis),
 - establishing a "Common Core" of expectations for all Johnston High School students, and
 - promoting student responsibility.
- Johnston High School will follow-up on all NEASC accreditation recommendations in the context of their "re-framed" school improvement plan.
- Johnston High School will "partner" with a Rhode Island Department of Education "Special Visitor" and appropriate staff over the next several months until student assessment results improve and NEASC accreditation is achieved.

RIDE Support

- RIDE will continue to offer Field Service support through the liaison team and instructional support team for both the middle school and high school.
- RIDE will meet periodically (monthly) with the High School improvement team until there is improvement in assessment results.

- RIDE will review documents relating to the NEASC accreditation efforts at Johnston High School.